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2 MINUTES



of EMPLOYMENT FACTS

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A SURVEY OF
SEASONAL
EMPLOYMENT

The first comprehensive survey of this growing Canadian problem has been completed.

*Brief
Employment
Facts*



A SURVEY OF SEASONAL EMPLOYMENT

DEPARTMENT OF LABOUR,
INFORMATION BRANCH,
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NUMBER 148

Seasonal unemployment is a growing social and economic problem in Canada. Since World War II, the volume of seasonal unemployment has been increasing year by year, as the pressures on our manpower resources for abnormally high production levels eased off after the war's end. At the same time, the distance from peak to trough in employment has widened as the number of workers employed by the seasonal industries has increased.

Seasonal unemployment is costly. In addition to a tremendous loss in productivity, it has been estimated that as much as 150 million dollars are lost each year in wages and purchasing power, while more than 93 million dollars were paid out in unemployment insurance benefits from December 1952, to April 1953, mostly to persons seasonally unemployed.

The National Advisory Council on Manpower in 1952 asked the National Employment Committee (advisory body to the National Employment Service) to institute a full investigation. As a first step, the committee drew up a questionnaire which was sent to more than one thousand employers in nineteen seasonal industries. The replies were analysed by the Economics and Research Branch of the Department of Labour and a report was prepared, based on the analysis and on earlier studies undertaken by the Department of Labour.

As might be expected, this, the first comprehensive survey on seasonal unemployment in Canada, has not found any simple solutions to this complex and widespread problem, but it has uncovered a very large number of approaches to solutions which are now being applied in varying degrees in the twenty-one seasonal industries which it covers. The Employment Committee in examining the report concluded that seasonal unemployment, in some industries at least, could be greatly eased, if not eliminated, by an extension of these methods.

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In some industries, seasonal unemployment is caused by the direct effect of the climate. Farming is an obvious example, as are inland shipping, logging and the construction of roads and bridges. In other industries, the ups and downs of employment are caused largely by custom and the habits of the consumer associated with the changing seasons. The weather cannot be changed, but habits can and it is in this second group of industries

where the most fruitful field for further efforts is to be found.

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The most important industry in this second group is undoubtedly the building construction industry, because it operates in every part of Canada, and its fluctuations have a great impact on the country's seasonal unemployment problem. Weather, of course, has inevitable effects on outside construction work, although much has been done to extend the building season. Inside work, such as painting, repairing and renovating, is not tied to the seasons, but long-standing habit seems to make most persons think about these smaller jobs at the traditional spring cleanup time and on into the summer months. It naturally follows that a change in the thinking of those in a position to order construction, particularly inside renovations and allied work, could have a very great effect in levelling off employment throughout the year, especially among skilled tradesmen.

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The survey covered other industries in which consumers can assist the employers and the unions in reducing seasonal unemployment. These industries include planing mills and those making meat and dairy products, canned and cured fish, carbonated beverages, women's clothing and agricultural implements.

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At the other end of the scale are those industries which are so seriously affected by climate that they find it virtually impossible to carry on normal work in winter—inland water transportation, and the construction of highways and streets, for instance. Even here, however, the industries have found ways of extending the time their workers are employed.

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One group of industries has large seasonal employment variations, but does not make a proportionate contribution to seasonal unemployment. The reason is that at peak seasons these industries take on many people who do not want year-round jobs. The industries include hotels and restaurants, those producing canned and preserved fruits and vegetables and the retail trades, and a large part of their peak working force is made up of housewives and students on vacation.

The report entitled "Seasonal Unemployment in Canada" is now available from the Department of Labour.



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